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ABSTRACT

Although identity researchers now believe that identity formation occurs not only by separation from others but also in relational contexts, few empirical studies of this concept have been conducted. This paper has three aims: (1) to reconceptualize identity formation to take relational aspects into account, focusing particularly on identity exploration; (2) to present some questions, yielded by this reconceptualization, on identity exploration for future empirical investigations; and (3) to propose a measure (interview questions) to probe identity exploration from the viewpoint of relatedness. The paper defines identity exploration as individuals' skills in considering, making use of, and negotiating with others to make a decision about an important life choice. Questions proposed for investigation include: (1) What persons are involved in the exploration process, and how do they function in it?; (2) What are the processes involved in the regulation between self and other?; (3) What kind of exploration can be distinguished?; and (4) What is the association between one's relational changes and identity exploration? The paper concludes with example questions from a revised version of the Ego Identity Interview developed by Grotevant and Cooper (1981). (EV)

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RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF IDENTITY EXPLORATION BY RELATEDNESS

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Introduction

The current view of identity researchers emphasizes that identity formation occurs not only by separation from others but also in relational contexts. This perspective has been argued in the following three positions:

1. From an interdisciplinary view, identity is commonly described as a dynamic tension between something about core and context in different disciplines (Graafsma, et al., 1994).

2. According to individuation theories, while young people become independent during adolescence, they maintain a firm bond with their family (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986).

3. In a feministic approach, it is thought that relational aspects of identity are important not only for females' identity but also for males' identity (Archer, 1992).

Although the relational aspects of identity seem to be important, there are few empirical studies about identity formation based on its conceptualization as occurring in relational contexts. Therefore, the present study operationalizes identity formation in a relational context, before conducting empirical investigations.

Aims

1. To reconceptualize identity formation based on the arguments that relational aspects play a role in identity formation. In particular, the present reconceptualization focuses on ***identity exploration***.

2. To present some questions, yielded by the present reconceptualization, on identity exploration for future empirical investigations.

3. To propose a measure, i.e., interview questions, to explore identity exploration from the viewpoint of relatedness.

Reconceptualization of identity exploration

Identity exploration is defined as an adolescent's active problem-solving behaviours to decide his or her life choice, and is a crucial component of identity formation (Grotevant, 1987).

There are various arguments concerning relatedness in identity formation. Whereas the relatedness in these arguments ranges from relations with individuals (e.g., significant others) to relations with wider contexts (e.g., school, society, culture), the present study concentrates on ***individuals***.

Some arguments refer to how these individuals are involved in an adolescent's identity formation. For instance:

> "The crucial events . . . of identity are usually fundamentally relational, rooted in ongoing efforts to affirm themselves in relationship, to express themselves with others while taking account of others' needs and interests, to recognize and resolve conflict, and to learn to live with unresolvable conflict while still sustaining connection" (Josselson, 1994, p. 101).

> "Initial steps in the identity formation process are focused on issues of escape and intrapsychic separation . . . . New individuals or groups of others who can share in and/or support the exploration process appears to facilitate movement" (Kroger, 1993, p. 218-219).

According to these arguments, identity exploration can be reconceptualized as ***individuals' skills in considering, making use of, and negotiating with others to make a decision about an important life choice***.

Furthermore, the central process of exploration can be described as ***the regulation between self and others***, that is, the ongoing process in which adolescents integrate others' points of view into their identities.

Some questions on identity exploration

1. ***What persons are involved in the exploration process, and how do they function in the process?***

   There are few empirical studies about persons who play important roles in adolescents' identity exploration. Therefore, there is a need to identify persons, especially significant others, and their functions in the exploration process.

2. ***What are the processes involved in the regulation between self and other?***

   As one possible process of the regulation between self and others, the present approach proposes the concept of interpersonal negotiation developed by Schultz et al. (1989). By using this concept, the exploration thought negotiations should be singled out and the persons with whom adolescents negotiate should be identified. Also, other forms of regulation need to be explored.

3. ***What kind of exploration can be distinguished?***

   When one considers the development of identity, it is important to examine what kind of exploration fosters the identity formation. It is useful to begin with identifying the patterns of exploration, and then to explore their relation to identity formation.

4. ***What is the association between one's relational changes and identity exploration?***

   Neither identity formation nor relationships with significant others end in adolescence. They are ongoing process through the life cycle. Thus, it is inferred that there is some association between the two. Particularly, the maintaining or collapsing of relationships with significant others might affect the state of one's identity.

Interview questions

The present approach proposes the revised version of Ego Identity Interview developed by Grotevant and Cooper (1981).

To assess relatedness in exploration, the revised questions were made with the following two intents: (a) to identify the persons involved in the exploration process and their functions in the process, and (b) to probe the subjects further about processes of the regulation between self and others if this process appears in the subjects' responses.

Examples of questions (occupational domain)*

Items identifying the persons involved and their functions in the exploration process are as follows:

—What people or experiences have been major influences on your plans for the future? (Probe: teachers, parents, reading, etc.)
—Earlier you told me that _____ influenced your plans for the future; what sort of roles do you think that he / she played when you made the decision?

Items which have some additional questions to probe the processes of the regulation are as follows:

—Earlier you told me that your parents disapproved of your future plans. Was this disagreement resolved in some way? How?
—[If resolved:]Why did you solve the disagreement in this way?
—[If not resolved:] How are you trying to resolve this disagreement with your parents?

* Marcia et al. (1993) and Schultz et al. (1989) were also referred to revise the interview questions.

Conclusion

The present approach is based on the current perspective that identity formation occurs not only by separation from others but also in relational contexts. In spite of the importance of this perspective, there are few empirical studies of identity formation from the viewpoint of relatedness. Therefore, it is expected that this approach will contribute to theory construction of identity formation by relatedness.

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